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Page Denied

Next 2 Page(s) In Document Denied



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50X1-HUM

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50X1-HUM

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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Replacement of Personnel Losses
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50X1-HUM

-4-

Replacement of Personnel Losses in an
Army Offensive Operation

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One of the complex problems which is being widely discussed in the pages of the military press is the replacement of losses in contemporary operations.* We would also like to express our views on this question.

Statistical data on personnel losses in army offensive operations during World War II show that the scale of losses fluctuated significantly in various operations, in various stages of one and the same operation, and in daily averages. The greatest general troop losses were registered in lengthy operations conducted with low tempos of advance and where superiority over the enemy in forces and weapons was insignificant. Under these conditions the average daily losses (in percentages of overall numbers) for rifle divisions and for tank and mechanized corps and brigades exceeded the average daily losses of the army for the same period of combat action.

Thus, the greatest losses were suffered by personnel in close contact with the enemy or near the front lines. Average daily losses in any army ran 0.6 to 1.2 percent; in divisions 3 to 6 percent; and in regiments 10 to 16 percent of the total number of their personnel. Along with this, average daily losses in divisions and regiments during periods of combat action in operational depth were, as a rule, two or three times less than in the case of a breach of enemy defenses.

During World War II the combat effectiveness of army troops was maintained at a level to ensure the fulfilment of their

*Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought," No. 3 (82), 1967; No. 2 (84), 1968; No. 1 (86), 1969.

-5-

tasks. This was accomplished primarily by increasing the combat strength of armies with combat effective rifle, tank, artillery, and other large units and units of the reserve of the fronts and of the Supreme High Command Headquarters. Replacement of personnel losses in large units of an army was achieved through draft replacement companies and, less commonly, battalions, either formed in the front or arriving from the interior of the country from reserve and training units; through the return to action of the lightly wounded and sick; and by drawing on the local population in liberated territory directly in the areas of combat action. In addition, combat subunits sometimes were replenished with personnel from subunits of rear services.

General conclusions from, and analysis of, data on personnel losses in contemporary operations* permit the assumption that the scale of overall losses in army offensive operations in a nuclear war from all types of weapons will fluctuate to a significant extent and can, on the average, run 30 to 60 percent and more of the total number of troops. In this context, armies engaged on the axes of the main strikes may sustain losses of 40 to 60 percent for the first offensive operation, while armies attacking on other axes may have losses of 30 to 50 percent. In the execution by an army of its immediate task at the beginning of a nuclear war, these losses can run 60 to 70 percent and more of the total number of losses in the operation; in the execution of subsequent tasks they can run 30 to 40 percent.

During an operation, large units and units of the arms of troops of an army can incur the following losses: motorized

*Based on the experience of scientific research military games conducted at the General Staff Military Academy, an inter-academy military game held in the Military Academy i/n M. V. Frunze, military-medical games which took place at the Military-Medical Academy, scientific research work done in the Military Academy for Communications, and articles in the periodical press.

T-O-P S-E-C-R-E-T

-6-

rifle and tank divisions, 10 to 80 percent and more; the rocket brigade, 40 to 90 percent; air defense troops, 20 to 90 percent; artillery, up to 50 percent; communications troops, 20 to 50 percent; engineer and chemical troops, up to 60 percent; and army rear troops, 10 to 50 percent. These figures indicate that the pattern of incurrence and distribution of losses which were characteristic for World War II, when the greatest percentage of losses fell on troops near the line where the two sides came into contact, loses its meaning when nuclear weapons are used. This pattern can be taken into consideration only for non-nuclear and, in part, for limited nuclear periods.

In a nuclear war troop losses will be massive, sudden, and highly diverse in nature, consequences, and the degree of disruption of organizational structure of troops. This latter aspect in turn will have a decisive influence on the choice of methods to replace personnel in restoring the combat effectiveness of groupings of troops.

If individual nuclear bursts can destroy subunits in part or as a whole, then group or mass nuclear strikes can cause the loss of combat effectiveness of whole units and even of large units. It is accordingly advisable to replace troops destroyed by nuclear weapons with combat-ready subunits, units, and large units.

In the experience of exercises and games, chemical weapons are less capable than nuclear ones in disrupting troop structure. This applies primarily on a company (battery) and battalion (batalon, divizion) scale, less on a regimental scale. However, the majority of people hit with poisonous substances will require immediate assistance directly in the area of the action. Personnel of subunits located in the zone of action, for all practical purposes, lose their combat effectiveness; it is also advisable to replace them with whole subunits. Quarantine measures against enemy bacteriological weapons during combat action will obviously be carried out by personnel of subunits, units, and large units. Consequently, appropriate combat-ready organizational elements are also needed for the replacement of troops hit with these weapons. If mass use of

50X1-HUM

-7-

napalm is made, it may also be necessary to use whole units as replacements for troops which have been hit.

Taking into consideration all these special features, it is our view that in the interest of preserving the combat effectiveness of groupings of troops, the following can be possible ways of replacing losses within the scope of the first army offensive operation in a nuclear war: the redistribution of personnel within large units, units, and subunits; the organization and execution of personnel shifts within the army; the timely creation of reserve army components; and the replacement of troops of the army from reserve, spare (zapasnoy), and training large units and units of the front.

In peacetime conditions armies, groups of troops, and military districts do not have spare and reserve components. Even if such units were mobilized in time, replacing personnel losses from them in any army offensive operation conducted at a fast pace and without any operational pauses would create enormous difficulties. This is particularly evident in the conditions of the Western theater of military operations.

Let us suppose that a war begins using only conventional weapons, and that its non-nuclear period lasts two to three days. Reserve components of arms of troops within the border military districts will be mobilized as quickly as possible and will begin immediately to move out to the areas of combat action. But even in this case a minimum of three to five days will be required to carry out all the necessary steps involved in mobilizing the troops and in moving them 800 to 1200 kilometers.

Thus, even in the best case the mobilized reserves can be expected to reach the army and the front only at the end of the first army offensive operation. And if the war should begin with the use of nuclear weapons, the replacement of losses with these components within the scope of this operation can in practical terms be excluded.

In such conditions it will be necessary to make do for the most part with internal capabilities in replacing losses for the

50X1-HUM

-8-

50X1-HUM

purpose of creating combat effective groupings of troops. A certain number of personnel can be obtained specifically by the redistribution of personnel within units and large units. Thus, the duties of tank driver-mechanics can be filled by senior mechanics and driver-mechanics of evacuation-transport platoons and sections, and by senior masters and mechanics of tracked-vehicle repair sections; and the duties of tank and gun team weapon leaders of regimental and battalion artillery can be filled by senior masters and masters of armament repair platoons and sections of repair workshop regiments, and repair and recovery battalions of divisions. It would be possible to cite such examples with regard to still other specialties in subunits of a division. For these purposes use should be made of personnel of combat subunits which are left without usable equipment, as well as personnel of subunits and units which have lost their combat effectiveness and are withdrawn from battle to be reformed.

Appropriate redistribution of personnel to restore the combat effectiveness of the necessary groupings of the army--primarily the missile and antiaircraft missile troops, but also combined-arms large units operating on the most important axes--can also be made among large units (separate units) of the army.

Replacement can come from various places, particularly from motorized rifle and tank units which have been covering the national border and have temporarily lost their combat effectiveness; from large units and units of the first and second echelons and of the reserves of the army which have lost their combat effectiveness and have been withdrawn for reformation; and from peacetime training units and subunits.

Replacement of personnel losses from weapons of mass destruction must be responsive to the nature and degree of loss of combat effectiveness of the troops of the army. When whole subunits and units, and sometimes even large units, are put out of action for a short period of time, it is advisable, as has been noted above, to replace losses with appropriate combat-ready organizational elements or with elements formed temporarily from troops which have lost their combat effectiveness.

50X1-HUM

-9-

For this purpose, personnel which are left must be organized into sections, teams, crews, platoons, companies, and batteries, and, if there is time and opportunity, into battalions and (artillery) battalions, and only then proceed with their assignments.

If these steps are carried out, they will of course produce some results. In the majority of cases, however, as calculations have shown, they cannot provide the full answer to the problem of timely replacement of personnel losses in an army.

This problem in a nuclear war, in our view, requires organic reserve components. It is advisable to have such reserves in the form of combat-ready subunits and units, both general purpose and made up of specialists in those specialties which are the most narrow and in shortest supply. This will naturally require a significant number of personnel. Calculations which we have made show that in order to maintain separate rocket battalions, tank and motorized rifle battalions, artillery and mortar subunits in combat effective status (two-thirds of authorized strength) in three motorized rifle and one tank division under conditions which the combined-arms army can sustain losses of 40 to 50 percent in the first offensive operation, it will be necessary to have in advance reserve components numbering up to 10,000 men.

In our opinion, such organic reserve components for the maintenance of combat effective troop status must basically ensure the replacement of anticipated losses in combat subunits from the first nuclear strike of the enemy. For this purpose, and for the benefit of the combined-arms large units of the armies, it is advisable to have the following combined into a reserve division: armament and equipment for two or three motorized rifle and two or three tank regiments, and for rocket battalions and chemical defense companies of divisions; and a minimum number of personnel for each subunit and unit at reduced strength. In this case, during a threat of war or during a non-nuclear war the armies will be able to mobilize the reserve components quickly for the most rapid possible restoration of combat effectiveness in combined-arms large units in a nuclear period.

50X1-HUM

-10-

Analysis shows that reserve components in combined-arms large units in quantities of one or two battalions per division cannot materially affect the replacement of losses. To accomplish this divisions would have to have at least a reserve regiment consisting of four to five combat effective battalions. However, this would make the division unwieldy and difficult to control. In addition, the experience of exercises and war games shows that in the first nuclear strike alone several divisions can sustain 70 to 80 percent losses with complete disruption of their organizational structure. With the onset of fast-moving offensive action the division will not be able to mobilize a reserve regiment out of subunits which are at reduced strength. Therefore, the buildup of reserve components in divisions during peacetime is rarely advisable. After they have made use of their internal capabilities and the capabilities of the army for replacing losses, combined-arms large units must be replaced with reserve combined-arms large units of the front or with troops brought up from the interior of the country.

Taking possible losses into consideration, it is also advisable to have in the front (even when there is an army of the second echelon) one or two reserve divisions for each army of the first echelon to replace large units which have lost their combat effectiveness. In addition, the replacement of troop losses in an army among officers and NCO's, and among privates with narrow specialties, will be made from reserve, spare, and training units and large units of the front which were already built up during peacetime, or in accordance with mobilization plans. For the restoration of destroyed control points of combined-arms large units and units in groups of troops, it is advisable still during peacetime to have staffs of divisions and regiments at somewhat reduced strength with means of communication.

50X1-HUM